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ABSTRACT

If educators, policymakers, and school administrators Employment Policy's current project on at-risk youth aged 9 to 15 school, graduate, and enjoy learning. Unfortunately, the current policy on education is targeted to young people who go on to college. Another fundamental problem with schools is that the school curriculum has become disconnected from real work. Education must be about opportunity. Students, teachers, and youths and the educational problems they encounter are also Education Act, as reauthorized in 1990, incorporates some of these priorities. The new law focuses on accountability for program quality and student achievement; program improvement; flexible regulations that will permit state and local educators maximum freedom to develop programs that meet student needs; the integration of vocational and academic curricula; and the Tech Prep Education Program that strengthens partnerships between secondary and postsecondary educators. Business has an important role to play to reform education. Education and business relationships improve the school-to-work transition by helping vocational education respond to changes in the labor market and by ensuring that students get the skills needed for available jobs. (YLB)

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BETSY BRAND
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"PREPARING STUDENTS FOR LEADERSHIP IN TOMORROW'S WORK"

OPENING GENERAL SESSION OF TRADE & INDUSTRIAL EDUCATION
AMERICAN VOCATIONAL ASSOCIATION
ANNUAL CONVENTION - CINCINNATI, OHIO - DECEMBER 1, 1990

Education makes a people easy to lead, but difficult to drive, easy to govern but impossible to enslave. -- Lord Brougham

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the Opening General Session of Trade and Industrial Education. I bring you greetings from Secretary Cavazos. This morning I'd like to talk to you about vocational-technical education and specifically the role vo-tech education plays in helping to prepare students for work and helping to improve all of education.

As I was preparing my remarks for this morning, I began to think of your title for this session, "Preparing Students for Leadership in Tomorrow's Work." I thought to myself, what an excellent idea. Stop and think for a moment, what it would be like if teachers and principals in every high school across the country saw this as their mission. Our educational system would not be in the trouble it is in today. If more educators, policy makers and school administrators took it upon themselves to prepare students for work, maybe more students would stay in school, graduate and maybe, just maybe, they would actually enjoy learning.

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Unfortunately today too many of our students are ciphers -- either forgotten, neglected, or simply overlooked by a system that continues to concentrate on getting students into college. Well, today only about 60 percent of America's high school students attend four-year postsecondary institutions and only about half of those go on to graduate.

Instead we have a system, as you know, that recognizes only one standard of excellence. This is the college-prep track or the baccalaureate degree. While the college-prep track is certainly a choice for many and we always encourage it for all of our students, it is not the choice for all. Under our current system however, many students see college as their only option and are not made aware of the other options available. Sometimes when students are faced with the choice between a school system that only rewards one standard of excellence or no school at all, many will choose to leave. Eleven million students out of the forty million now enrolled in elementary or secondary schools will not graduate from high school. And of those who do go on for a four-year college degree, less than 25% will complete it. This is not because they've chosen to be unsuccessful, but because we have chosen to define their success in limiting ways. We need to discover and build on the strengths and abilities of these students.

Imagine if, after this convention, all of you sitting in this room had lost your airline tickets, misplaced your car keys, or otherwise had no way to get home. Furthermore,

imagine that there was a pool of money and an information desk to assist travelers in their return trip. These resources, however, were available to only a few of you. Well, those fortunate few would return home safely and uneventfully. Those remaining, for the most part, would be on their own. Eventually, most of you would make it home, it might take you longer, you might not go in the most direct route, and you might go in two or three different directions before you eventually found your way. Well that, in somewhat simplistic terms, is our current policy on education -- a policy that is targeted to young people who go on to college -- and I ask you, is this any way to prepare students for leadership in tomorrow's work?

Another fundamental problem with our schools today is that we have allowed school curriculum to become disconnected from real work. For example, many in the business community have complained that the high school diploma is meaningless, that it does not measure real skills, and that it is only an indication that a student has remained in school. The high school diploma has become more a Certificate of Perseverance than a Degree of Achievement. Since high schools aren't teaching the skills needed in the workplace, businesses have increasingly been forced either to pay higher wages to those with at least a year or two of college, or to higher unskilled workers and train them. The Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce reported that 90% of the companies interviewed pay high school graduates the same wages as non high school graduates. If that's the case -- why not drop out?

We need to make the high school diploma worth something again. We need education that is more relevant to the real world, and we need to bring more of the real world into education. Students' minds are not empty containers into which we pour knowledge. We need to consider what they already know, adjust to their particular style of learning, and provide concrete examples of how their studies relate to the work force they will enter. If we fail to do this, we run the risk of losing them.

Education must be about opportunity, and not just the opportunity to go to college but opportunity for all to achieve their full potential. Knowledge can be a powerful thing when it leads to empowerment, and empowering our students is what education must be about. Across the country we see examples of people taking full responsibility for their lives. Whether they are residents of tenant-owned public housing, parents choosing schools for their children, or citizens coming together to rid their neighborhoods of drugs and violence, people are challenging the status quo. We in education need to challenge the status quo and empower our students and give them more responsibility so that they may be masters of their future. We also need to send a message to our students that hard work and graduating count. Al Shanker believes that it's time to demand even more from America's high school graduates. And I agree with Al.

We need a system in which teachers are no longer just educators: they are facilitators, not lecturers, leaders not managers, and role models not role players. They will

encourage, prod, question and listen. They will use technology to allow students to embark on customized self-paced, individualized learning programs. Educational programs and computer-assisted instruction will build on a student's strengths and allow them to work on their weak areas.

Teachers will be free to act as coaches -- providing explanations or insight when needed, pointing the direction to further study in areas of interest, making the connection across disciplines or to the world of work, and perhaps, most importantly, supporting and building self-esteem.

In this new approach to education, the individual rules. President Hoover used to speak of the American system of rugged individualism. We must change our education system so it meets the needs of each and every individual. Students should be given credit for their strengths and not diminished for their weaknesses; they should be rewarded for success, not punished for failure; and they should be encouraged for their questions, not discouraged from their curiosity.

Multiple learning styles will abound. Teachers and administrators will need to be able to respond to those multiple learning styles. Some students might prefer the traditional theoretical/academic approach; others may learn best under a hands-on approach; still others, perhaps most, would prefer a combination of these two styles, using more occupationally relevant material in academic courses and more academic

education in vocational courses and then linking the two . Alternatives for teaching and learning will save our students and strengthen our schools.

Simply empowering students, though, will not be enough. We need to empower our teachers and principals by putting power and responsibility back into their hands. John Chubb, concludes in his book, Politics, Markets, and America's Schools, that the common trait shared by all effective schools is lack of bureaucracy.

Teachers and principles need the tools to get their job done and done well. These tools are standards that define what our students should know. These standards should be set with input from business and industry and educators should be held accountable for meeting them. We spend $200 billion a year on education in the U.S. without a national consensus on what we expect in return.

Since we met last year in Florida, the world has changed around us. Some changes are dramatic and command front page headlines -- Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and the Middle East. Others are less dramatic, but no less important. The changes taking place in vocational-technical education though not featured on network newscasts, will significantly alter how we educate and train our work force.

As you know, 1990 was the year we reauthorized the Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act. Many of the priorities the Administration had been seeking were

incorporated in to the new law. I would like to mention some of those.

One area we focused on was in accountability for program quality and student achievement. The law requires states to implement systems of performance standards related to students improvements in basic skills, their acquisition of occupational competencies, and their success in the labor market.

Another area was in program improvement. T' 's overarching goal is a fundamental change in the new Act and we are pleased that dollars will be used for total program improvement.

A third area we feel strongly about will be reflected in the regulations that will implement provisions of the Act, which the Department of Eduction is responsible for writing. In accordance with decisions made at the Education Summit just over a year ago, we will try to make the regulations as flexible as possible and to permit state and local educators the maximum freedom to develop vocational-technical programs that meet the particular needs of their students.

We just held a series of regional meetings to elicit a broad range of advice and recommendations on how to ensure that the regulations effectively promote the further improvement of our vocational-technical education system.

Another major theme of the Perkins Act is the integration of vocational and academic curricula. There is some evidence that the best approach to achieving the goal of universal competency in basic skills may be to integrate academic and vocational teaching methods into new applied academic courses for all students.

Policy makers reforming secondary vocational education, vocational educators trying to find a new relevance for their programs, and business people decrying the narrow vocationalism of the schools, have all leant their support to integration. Courses such as "Principles of Technology" which is now taught in 1,200 schools in 47 states, applied mathematics and applied communications, combine academic concepts with hands-on instruction to make schoolwork more relevant to vocational students and help keep young people in school.

A separate but related area, and one of the most exciting parts of the new law, is the Tech Prep Education Program. The purpose of this program is to provide planning and demonstration grants to consortia of local education agencies and post-secondary institutions for the development and operation of two-year associate degree or two-year certificate programs.

Coordinating secondary vocational-technical programs with two-year postsecondary occupational instruction into a four-year sequence of instruction, and further strengthening partnerships between secondary and postsecondary educators is one of

the major themes of the new law which will significantly improve the school-to-work transition.

This leads me to the important role business must play in any effort to reform education. Business and industry are well positioned to anticipate work force needs. By encouraging links vocational-technical education can more easily respond to what the market demands. Education and business partnerships improve the school-to-work transition by helping vocational-technical schools respond to changes in the labor market, and by ensuring that students get the skills they need for available jobs.

Before I conclude, I'd like to say that no discussion of how we prepare students for leadership in tomorrow's work would be complete with mentioning the vital role that student organizations play. The people involved in student organizations -- the students, the teachers, the administrators, and the industry supporters -- exemplify the best in vocational education. You are our success stories.

This year VICA celebrated its 25th anniversary. VICA has always had the support of the Department of Education. Many of the goals toward which you strive are crucial to our continued economic competitiveness and to meeting the nation's education goals.

This past summer I had the opportunity to attend the U.S. Skills Olympics in Oklahoma

and next year I hope to be able to make it to the International Skills Olympics in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. I think that VICA's dedication to developing well rounded vocational students, productive future employees, and responsible citizens is something for which everyone involved should be very proud.

In conclusion, I'd like the thank all of you for your commitment to improving vocational-technical education in the U.S. It was just over a year ago that I was confirmed as Assistant Secretary at the Department of Education. I can tell you that this past year has been one of the most exciting, challenging and rewarding for me. Because of our system of public education, many of the key decisions about eduction are made and implemented at the state and local level. It is people like you, and all the others here in Cincinnati, that make the difference. We have much work ahead of us, and at times we may not always agree on strategies. But the goal of improving education and providing for all citizens the opportunities to reach their full potential is a goal we all share. This is a responsibility and a challenge that we must all accept. Thank you.